

THE HOUSE OF MOURNING AND THE HOUSE OF FEASTING

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A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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[This sermon was delivered on the Lord's-day following the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Olney, and in the midst of the cholera time, when Mr. Spurgeon's life was so graciously preserved under the singular circumstances described by him in Volume 1 of his *Autobiography* (Passmore & Alabaster). The four volumes of the "Standard life of C. H. Spurgeon" can now be obtained for a guinea, through all booksellers and colporteurs, or direct from the publishers, Paternoster Buildings, London.]

"It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting."
Ecclesiastes 7:2

THE maxim that happiness lies between two extremes is, I believe, the dictate of prudence, and has the sanction of God's Word. The ancients always spoke of this as being the most happy state of life. Somewhere between the two extremes of ecstatic joy and doleful melancholy lies the thing we call, "happiness." Ancient poets used to sing of the *via media*, or the middle way. We know that Agur, an inspired writer, prayed to God that He would give him "neither poverty nor riches," that he might walk in the middle way of life. And as the medium with regard to wealth is to be preferred, so I believe the middle way is to be chosen with regard to happiness.

In the green plains betwixt two high hills is the place where happiness generally resides. The man who is not often lifted up with joy, nor often depressed in spirit through grief, who walks through the world in a calm and quiet atmosphere, bearing about with him a holy complacency, a calm serenity, and an almost uniformity—that man is a happy man. He who journeys along without mounting up as an eagle, or without diving down into the depths of the sea—he who keeps along the even tenor of his way to his death is entitled to the name of a happy man.

But my friends, I think it falls to the lot of very few of us always to stay there. I know it does not fall to my portion always to walk between the two extremes. I cannot always sing in the vale, like Bunyan's shepherd boy, I wish I could live there, but I cannot. There is a high mountain on that side of the valley, and another on this side, and I have to climb the steep sides of both those mountains. On the brow of the hill on that side there stands a fantastic structure, very much like those fairy palaces which we fabricate in our dreams by the aid of the architect of fancy, and this is called "the house of feasting."

On the other side of the valley of mediocrity stands a gloomy castle overhung with damp weeds and moss, it looks like one of those desolate places where superstition has fabled that old giant used to live, it is called "the house of mourning." We have most of us alternately to go to each of these houses. Sometimes we are rejoicing in "the house of feasting," at other times we are weeping in the castle of mourning, hanging down our heads like bulrushes, and crying, "Alas, alas!"

Standing thus, in the middle of the plain, as I profess to do this morning, I am about to speak to you of both those places—of that fantastic structure *there* and of the gloomy castle *here*, and though bright-eyed cheerfulness would prompt me to say that "it is better to go to the house of feasting than to go to the house of mourning," with the Word of inspiration before me, I trust to be able to show that "the Preacher" spoke the truth, when he said, "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting."

In order that I may set this truth of God in as clear a light as possible, I shall invite you first to *go with me to "the house of feasting,"* then to *"the house of mourning,"* and after that we will examine two

or three verses which succeed the text, and look at *the wise man's reasons for preferring "the house of mourning" to "the house of feasting."*

I. First, WE WILL GO TO "THE HOUSE OF FEASTING," and I am sure that I shall have abundance of company if I invite you to go there.

You never need go alone to a feast, simply blow the trumpet of announcement, simply tell the people we are going to "the house of feasting," and they are all ready to go there. There is a joyous spark in every man's breast, which at once ignites his soul and he says, "If you are about to go to a feast, I will go with you, if there is joy in any cup, let me drink of it." I am going to "the house of feasting," and I shall take you to it in three steps. We shall go to *the house of sinful feasting*, first of all, then to *the house of innocent feasting*, and after that we will go to *the house of spiritual feasting*. I trust that we shall find something good in some of those houses, but we shall find nothing so good as in "the house of mourning."

We are going, first of all, *to the house of sinful feasting*, no, we are not going inside, but we will look at the outside of the house and hear a little of its history. I would have none of you cross the threshold of that place. But we are going together up the side of the hill to that "house of feasting."

What a crowd I have around me, and I seem to be half ashamed of myself! There is the low drunkard, and here comes the vile rake, and they are going to the same house. "Whither are you going, drunkard?" I ask. "I am going to the house of feasting," says he. "And you, bloated one, where are you going?" "I am going to the house of feasting."

I begin to be ashamed of my company. I fear that, whatever the house may be, the people going there are not very choice spirits, and I hardly like to proceed further. I begin to think that the gloomy "house of mourning" is better than "the house of feasting" after all, considering the company that frequent it. I fear that I must turn back at once, I cannot enter there, for I love good company.

I would rather go to "the house of mourning" with the children of God, I would rather be chained in a dungeon, wrist to wrist with a Christian, than I would live forever with the wicked in the sunshine of happiness. The company I meet makes me suspect that it is true that "the house of mourning" is better than "the house of feasting."

Now I have got to the gate of this palace. I have climbed the hill, and stand there, but before I enter, I want to know something of the history of those who have gone there. I will not go in until I know whether there is any hope of my returning. The house is comely and good outside, but I want to know whether it is all that it seems. I want to know if there be that happiness there which it professes to have, and I ask them to bring me out the records of the house. They bring me out the roll, wherein is kept a record of the persons who have gone there. I turn it over, and I resolve that I will never go into the house, for the list of persons who have gone there is a catalog of woe.

I will just tell you one or two cases of persons who went to this house of feasting, or rather, let me tell it to you in another way by reminding you that most of the awful catastrophes that have ever happened in this world have happened to men when they have been in "the house of feasting" [A reference to the first page of this sermon will show that it was preached when Mr. Spurgeon was only just twenty years of age. Readers may be interested in a list of later sermons by him upon some of the incidents here mentioned. They are as follows—NOAH—See sermon #823, Noah's Flood, SAMSON—See sermon #224, Samson Conquered, and #1939, Shaven and Shorn, but Not Beyond Hope].

It is a fact, which I will prove in a moment or two, that the most terrible calamities that have ever come upon man, or on the world, have happened in the house of mirth. Where was the world when Noah entered into the ark? Where was it when God rent the clouds, and opened the windows of heaven, and sent down cataracts from the skies? Is it not written, "They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark"?

What were the Israelites doing when the plague came and smote them, so that their carcasses fell in the wilderness? Is it not written, "While the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague"?

Where were Job's sons and daughters when the great wind came from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house? They "were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house." Where was Samson when he lost his strength? He was in the house of sinful pleasure, lying asleep with his head in Delilah's lap.

What had Nabal been doing when "his heart died within him, and he became as a stone"? Inspiration says that he had been feasting, "he held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king; and Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken." Who slew Amnon? Did not Absalom's servants slay him at a feast? Turn to the melancholy catastrophes that you find recorded in Holy Writ, and you will find that almost every one of them happened at a feast.

So, throughout the whole history of nations, I might tell you instance after instance in which a feast has been a real funeral, for the most terrible calamity has followed. There is, however, one instance which I must not pass by without describing it more fully than those at which I have briefly hinted.

There was a feast, once, such as I think was scarcely ever seen before or since. Ten thousand lamps lit up the gorgeous palace, the king sat on his lofty throne, and around him were his wives and concubines, and the princes and lords of his realm. They ate, they drank, the bowls were filled to the brim, and emptied again and again, and merrily the hours danced on, wild was the Bacchanalian shout, and loud the lascivious song.

They drank yet more deeply and invoked curses upon the God of Jacob. The king sent for the gold and silver vessels from the temple at Jerusalem, and they poured into them their unhallowed liquors, they drank, and drank again, and the merry shout rang through the hall, the viol and harp were there, and all sorts of music sounded loud and long.

But list! list! list! this is the last feast that Babylon shall ever see, even now her enemies are at her gates. They come! They come! O Belshazzar, read the writing on the wall! "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting [See sermon #257, The Scales of Judgment]. Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians." O Belshazzar, stay your feasting! See, the shaft of God—the death-shaft is whizzing through the air, it has pierced his heart—he falls dead, and with him great Babylon falls!

That feast was a feast of death. It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of such "feasting" as that. Here is a melancholy proof of the assertion I made, that most of the terrible calamities that have ever happened to men have happened in "the house of feasting."

Here is another house. I have read your record, O mistress of the house! I say, woman, I have read your record, and it is enough for me, I need not cross your threshold, I do not want to see your magnificent temple, I never wish to sit in your splendid halls. Rather would I sleep nightly in my shroud, and sit on my coffin, and have my gravestone in the wall of my study, and live in a vault forever, than I would enter that "house of feasting."

O God, may I be kept from sinful mirth! May I be kept from the house of sinful feasting! May I never be tempted to cross that threshold! O young men, who are enchanted by its gaiety, charmed by its music, stay away, stay away, for every plank in the floor is rotten, every stone that is there is dug from the quarries of hell, and if you enter into that woman's mansion, you shall find that her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death. "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting"—the house of sinful feasting.

But my friends, *there is a "house of feasting" to which every Christian may go.* You heard my prayer, just now, that I might never cross the threshold of the house of *sinful* feasting, but there is a "house of feasting" to which I would invite all Christians. Christianity never was intended to make men miserable. On the contrary, it has a tendency to make them happy. There are feasts in which Christians may indulge, there are times of feasting when Christians may eat and drink, and may make their soul merry within them.

Rejoice, O Christian, that you are not shut out from all banquets! Though yon door is marked with a plague spot, there is another where you may go, start not back, for Christ Himself went there. One of the

first houses that we know that Jesus entered was “the house of feasting.” He was at “a marriage in Cana of Galilee,” and there He turned the water into wine [See sermons #225, Satan’s Banquet, #226, The Feast of the Lord, and #1556, The Waterpots at Cana], so there are feasts to which Christians may go. There are bowls out of which they may drink, there are meats of which they may eat, there are places where they may rejoice.

Christians are not bound to give up pleasures that are innocent, but pleasures that are sinful. There are pleasures they may enjoy, there are feasts where the drugged cup of the drunkard is never found, where the song of lust is never heard, where the obscene word is never uttered, such feasts I have seen, feasts of which God Himself approves, feasts where every heart was full of love, and every soul was full of joy. We were mirthful, we were happy, and yet we sinned neither in our hearts nor with our lips.

Let me notice one or two feasts that are not sinful, but in which we may indulge. There is the family feast. Ah, the family meeting is a pleasant thing when, once in the year, the sire, who has his sons far away in business, invites them all to come to his house. There is a happy family, whether it be great or small, they meet around him, and the old man blesses God that he is spared to see his children. Oh, what hallowed mirth that is, when each is there, and sees his brethren all around! Perhaps there may be grandchildren, but that only increases the joy.

Such feasts I have seen, and I trust I may live to see many, when I can meet my brethren and sisters, and can sit with them, and my father and mother, and feel that scattered as we have been, there is yet a home where we can all come, and meet together, and be happy. Such feasts as these are allowable.

Again, there is the feast of brotherly kindness, such a feast as Joseph made for his brothers in Egypt. I wish there were more brotherly kindness in some families. It is hard when brother hates brother, when families are severed from each other. Born of the same mother, how can you quarrel? Having had the same father’s instructions, having been rocked in the same cradle, having played under the same roof, and run in the same garden, how can you differ now? Oh, it would be better if there were more brotherly love, and such feasts as Joseph made, which are allowable, when we can meet together, and pour our hearts into each other’s and talk of Jesus.

Then again, there are feasts of hospitality, and such feasts are not only allowable but commendable—such as Abraham made when he saw three men standing by his tent door, and he had a calf killed, and cakes prepared, and spread a banquet for them to eat, and thereby “entertained angels unawares,”—such as we find Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary, made, when Jesus came to their house at Bethany—such feasts of hospitality are good things. They must not come too often, they must not be misused, but it is well to entertain the children of God, it is well to receive the wayfarer. This Christians ought to do more than they do now, and so be “given to hospitality.”

There are, again, feasts of charity, such as Matthew made when he invited a great number of publicans and sinners [See sermon #2889, Christ Receiving Sinners] to meet Jesus at his house, and I am sure that where my Master went, I never need be ashamed to go. I have gone into some persons’ houses, before I came to London, that I should have felt ashamed to enter if they had not invited me on a Sabbath day. I have stepped in there for the purpose of giving them religious advice.

Some have said, “What! Going into that house?” Yes, and quite right too. “They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick.” I have gone after “the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” and I have won their hearts because I went there. I have talked to them of their sins, but had I stayed away, there would have been something of this spirit, “Stand by, for I am holier than you, I cannot enter your house because you chanced, on such and such a day, to sin.”

But when I go and talk to a man, and lay my hand on his shoulder, and ask him questions, he does not mind telling out his state of mind when I am under his own roof, and when I am gone, he says, “That man is not ashamed to speak to his fellows after all, though he is a preacher.” Make feasts of charity sometimes, and invite the poor to them. I will tell you the best dinner party that you can have. If you have “the poor and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind,” sitting round your table, you do more honor to your dining room than you would by having a company of princes and nobles there.

But beloved, good as “the house of mourning” is, excellent as its shades may be, mark well that Solomon does not say that “the house of mourning” is morally better than “the house of feasting,” or that there is more virtue in weeping than in rejoicing, yet he does say that “it is better to go to the house of mourning”—it is better to sit by the side of the widow, it is better to take the fatherless child on your knee, it is better to sit down and weep with those that weep than it is to go to the pavilion of happiness and rejoice with those that rejoice.

With such hearts as ours, it is better. Were we perfect, it would be equally good, but since we are inclined to evil, it is better that we should “go to the house of mourning.” God has made man upright, but the hand of sin has pushed us from the perpendicular, and we stand like the leaning tower of Pisa, inclined to the earth, and threatening to fall. It is right, then, that as we are inclined to sin, we should likewise be made to bend to sorrow.

Now, beloved, we must very hastily make a third visit “to the house of feasting,” and it will be better than either of the other two—better than the first because it is not sinful, better than the second because it is more spiritual. Have I not often gone to *the spiritual “house of feasting,”* and there feasted on the dainties of eternal love? Have I not soared, as on the wings of eagles, far beyond the clouds, beyond that glowing firmament where the stars are glittering, beyond that house where the sun strips himself of his garments, and like a giant starts upon his race?

Have I not looked into heaven itself, and gone near the very throne of God in ecstasy of joy, mounting up beyond all the troubles and trials of this mortal life? Yes, and so have you, beloved, sometimes when God has given you the spirit of rejoicing, you have “rejoiced with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.” The spouse said of her Beloved, “He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.”

Have not you also been to that banqueting house? Have you not tasted the delicious food and other delicacies which God alone prepares? Have you not had a share of the choice things that are stored up for the saints of God, and tasted the “wines on the lees well refined”? Yes, doubtless you have, and you have said, just as Peter did, “Master, it is good for us to be here.”

Look at that passage of Scripture, (Luk 9:33), for it is added directly afterwards, “not knowing what he said.” And you and I have said, “O God, it is good to be here, it is sweet to dwell upon the top of the Delectable Mountains, it is blessed to sit in such places of security,” and we have said, “Lord, let not this joy be merely for a week, but for a year, yea, let me have years of the sunshine of Thy countenance, nay, more, let me have an eternity of it!” Yet, like Peter, you know not what you say.

Yet, beloved, it really does seem a strange thing that I should have to say, “It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting,” for I am sure that I do not like “the house of mourning” half as well as this “house of feasting.” I would sooner meditate on the name of Jesus, and drink drops of honey from this well of sweetest nectar, I would sooner live on Calvary’s summit, or sit forever on the top of Tabor, or dwell on Pisgah and see the—

“Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood.”

I would rather live forever in ecstasy of delight, and see the river Jordan rolling there, and far beyond, the everlasting city, with its pearly gates and its shining golden streets, but beloved, it must not be. We would rather have it so, but it is better for us “to go to the house of mourning” than it is to live forever in, or even “to go to the house of feasting.”

II. Now, we are to leave “the house of feasting,” and “GO TO THE HOUSE OF MOURNING.”

There it is, a gloomy place up a steep rock covered with moss, and we **MUST** go there. The great fisher, Destiny, stands there, and with hook in each man’s flesh, he drags us on where he pleases. There is an iron chain that links us all together, and binds us in the bonds of everlasting destiny, and go we *must* where that chain drags us, we cannot resist and we *must* “go to the house of mourning.” Therefore,

O child of mirth, lay aside your merriment, and come with me into the valley of tears, and wait a little while in “the house of mourning.”

Some of you, my dear friends, have been in “the house of mourning” this week, and I have been called to go with you there. You have been there personally *because of the loss of your friends*, you have been into the deep caverns of “the house of mourning.” How often have the mourners gone about the streets, and we have seen the solemn funeral march through our crowded thoroughfares! So often have I seen it that it begins to be a common thing—so often have I seen it, during the last month or so, that it seems almost an old thing, and it looks as if earth were going to wrack and ruin, and all the bonds of society were about to be dissolved.

I say that some of you may be suffering the loss of your friends, and may be saying, “No others have suffered as we have.” Say not so, there *have* been others who have been quite as sorely bereaved as you have been. The path of sorrow has been well trodden, princes have been there, nobles have been there, earls and dukes have jostled in the crowd with the poor man who had nothing to lose but his one child, and his yet unburied wife.

Death has touched, with his impartial hand, the palace of the prince and the cottage of the peasant. Say not, therefore, that God has dealt harshly with you. The gravel stones and the wormwood may be in your mouth, but others, as well as you, have had to eat those gravel stones and to drink that wormwood, you are not alone, alas! far from it.

Many of us have gone “to the house of mourning” *simply as visitors to console others*, and I can say, from the deepest recesses of my soul, that I think I have sorrowed, at certain periods this week, almost as much as if I had been myself the real mourner, when at different hours I have been with the dying. Only last Friday, just before the clock struck twelve at midnight, I was in a cottage, by the bedside of a dying woman, and often have I gone direct from one deathbed to another. It is not a pleasant thing, but it is my duty, and I find a reward in it. Let me say, do not fear “to go to the house of mourning” as visitors, go and comfort those who are distressed.

Why should we tremble? Go, every one of you, there is an imperative duty on every member of this church to visit the sick. We do not do that as much as we ought to do. You must all help me in this matter. I met a man in the street only yesterday, who complained that I had not been to see his wife, but he excused me, for he said he knew that, single-handed, I could not visit everybody. You must go and help the mourning, and give them comfort in every way that you can.

Now, we are going, for a minute or two this morning, “to the house of mourning.” Let me, first of all, before we enter that house, do as I did with “the house of feasting”—let me ask for the record roll, and see whether it is true that this house is better than the other. Where is the roll? Bring it out, sad maiden, you who are clad in black, with weeping eyes and arching eyebrows. There is the list. *There are some names there of those who have not been much profited by adversity.*

I see the name of Ahaz [See sermon #2993, “That King Ahaz”], and I read, “In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the LORD.” I see another name there, the name of Jonah, who said to the Lord, “I do well to be angry, even unto death,” because his gourd had been taken away. I see the name of Israel, to whom God said, “Why should ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more,” and there is Ephraim, of whom the Lord said, “Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone” [See sermon #1140, “Let Him Alone”].

There are names of others in that catalog who have not profited by bereavement, I see some such here this morning. O ungodly men and women, God has spoken not only once, but twice, nay, more, He has taken out His rod, He has bruised you, yet you have not kissed the hand that has smitten you. He will say next, “Angel of justice, you have used My rod upon that incorrigible wretch, but he yields not, now draw your sword, and cut down the rebel, he who spurns My rod shall feel My sword.”

What think you of yourselves? Have any of you laughed at God’s rod? Are any of you as hardened as you were before you were afflicted? Are you still resolved to go on in your wicked ways, and to

persevere in your transgressions? If so, assuredly the sword of the Lord “is sharpened, and also furbished,” and it shall cut through soul and body to your everlasting destruction unless you repent.

How I rejoice to see, on the other hand, that *there are some who have been profited in this “house of mourning.”* There is the name of David, who said, “Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy Word.” Further down there stands the name of Manasseh, of whom we read, “When he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers.” I find many names of others who have been benefited by going “to the house of mourning.” There is the name of Job, to whom the Lord gave twice as much as he had before. That is a good list, and when I look at it, I think that it is better to go to this house than to “the house of feasting.”

Before I leave that matter entirely, I must make one brief remark, and that is that *there is a “house of mourning” to which I would have you go every day.* Oh, it is a place of woe indeed, it is a place of agony indeed, it is a place of suffering indeed. That spot is called Gethsemane. This is a place of mourning to which I would have you often go. It is the Garden of Gethsemane [See sermon #693, The Garden of the Soul], where the mighty Jesus, the Son of God, bent His knees in agony, and wrestled with His Father. He said to His disciples, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death,” and “His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”

*“Gethsemane, the olive press!
And why so call’d let Christians guess.”*

Gethsemane, with its gloomy olive shades and its dark brook—truly, the King Himself has gone over the brook Kedron—O thou Gethsemane, thy bitter herbs are sweet to me! I could dwell in your gloom forever.

*“Thou art heaven on earth to me,
Lonesome, dark Gethsemane.”*

I have been there, and I still love to visit that sacred spot. I never feel so holy, so really happy, as when I sit in that “house of mourning,” and see my Savior wrestling for my sins. It is better to go to Gethsemane, “the house of mourning,” than to any place of feasting in the world.

III. Now, dear friends, time will only permit me just to mention THE ARGUMENTS OF THE WISE MAN HERE.

I find that I have a very large subject, and I might preach a much longer sermon, but I never like to detain you beyond the usual time.

Let us read what Solomon says, “It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting,” first, “for that is the end of all men,” secondly, “the living will lay it to his heart,” and thirdly, “by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better,” and fourthly, “the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning.”

“It is better to go to the house of mourning” then, first of all, *because that is the end to which we must come.* We must die, there is no discharge in this war. The decree is determined in heaven, it is written like the laws of the Medes and Persians, so that it cannot be altered, that each must go to the house of mourning, and must die. “It is greatly wise for us to talk with our last hours.”

We have heard of a man who had a skeleton in his bedroom, and he was a wise man if he used it wisely. We know that the Egyptians, at every feast, had a skeleton at the end of the table, and they were wise men if they thought rightly of it. It is great wisdom to make death our everyday companion. The horses that they use in war are at first very much afraid of the smoke and the noise, but I am told that they take those horses into the barrack yards first, and fire into their faces with powder, until they are so used to it that they will easily go into the battle.

So we ought often to accustom our souls to the thought of death, to make death a familiar thing, to talk with it every day. How can we do it better than by going to “the house of mourning” where our friends lie dead?

*“Our dying friends come o’er us like a cloud,
To damp our brainless ardors and abate
That glare of life, which often blinds the wise.
Our dying friends are pioneers to smooth
Our rugged pass to death; to break those bars
Of terror and abhorrence, nature throws
’Cross our obstructed way, and thus to make
Welcome as safe yon port from every storm.”*

So says Young, and he says well. It is well to think of our lost friends, and to “go to the house of mourning.”

Again, the wise man says, “It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and *the living will lay it to his heart.*” If you go to the “house of feasting,” there is nothing there to lay to heart. It is all froth, it is lighter than vanity, it is a bubble, touch it and it vanishes, but in “the house of mourning” there is something solemn which will bear to be touched and still endure.

In the darkness there seems to be something more solid than in sunshine. I feel that when I “go to the house of mourning,” I get something to bring away, and lay to my heart. If I “go to the house of feasting,” it does not touch my heart. I wear the festal garb, I put on those things that are seemly on such occasions, and there it ends, I have learned nothing to lay to heart.

Yet again, the wise man says, “*By the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.*” It is positively a good thing for us to be sad, when the strings that bind heart to earth are cut, then we can soar. We are chained to earth, but there is a water in these eyes, which, like *aqua fortis*, can eat away the iron and set us free. The heart is made better by sorrow because it is made more free from earth. It is made better by sorrow, again, because it becomes more sensitive, more impressed with the lessons of God’s Word. We can shut our ears to the voice of God in mirth, but in “the house of mourning” we can hear every whisper. It is better to hear of Him in this “house of mourning.” The noise of the song does drown the still small voice of God, but in “the house of mourning” you can hear every footfall, even the voice of time, the ticking of the clock which says, “Now, now, now!”

Now to conclude, Solomon says, “*The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning.*” There are some places we ought to go to just as many people go to church and chapel. They go to chapel and leave their hearts at their shop. If you have done so this morning, you had better send for your hearts before you go home, my friends. But there are some places, I say, to which we ought to go without our hearts, and we ought to do so whenever we go to “the house of feasting.”

Perhaps, in some sense, we may have our hearts there, but we had better not have them there, or they are sure to get somewhat contaminated. But when we “go to the house of mourning,” we may take our hearts there because we are sure to bring them back. When we “go to the house of feasting,” we are inclined to say, “Stay here, my heart. This is a pleasant place,” But when we “go to the house of mourning,” we say, “We will not leave our hearts in that gloomy place.”

When I get to “the house of mourning,” I can speak out, but in “the house of feasting,” I hold my tongue as with a bridle. In “the house of mourning” I can speak with a bereaved brother and sister, I can talk freely with them, I can talk my heart out there, I can speak my soul out there, and need not hold it in, I can speak my Master’s dear name and tell of the wonders of His grace, and enlarge upon His wondrous preciousness.

Finally, take this truth home. You had better “go to the house of mourning” than to any place of feasting. Better to be clad in the drapery of woe, and sit in the weeds of sorrow, better to be girt with sackcloth, and cover your head with ashes, than to be feasting and dancing, or even enjoying the rightful and lawful pleasures of this world. “It is better to go to the house of mourning,” God has said it, so let not unbelief deny what God positively declares.

Unto all of you who know not how soon any one of you may be there, I speak in the name of the Lord, and I say, “Go to the house of mourning.” In a little while, death may be again in our midst, as he has often been of late. Even now, he is flapping his dark wings around this gallery, and looking in each pew to see who is there. He is floating across the pews and saying, “Where is the man or woman I am to have?” If God points death to the man, the man surely dies.

At all events, you may be called “to go to the house of mourning” very soon in some way or other, but say, when you get there, “It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting.” If you get an invitation to a wedding, and an invitation to a funeral, lay the funeral note on the top. Do not disdain to go there, O child of God, for the Holy Ghost will so reveal Jesus by the bedside of the mourner that it will be to you a Bethel!

O sinner, ungodly and impenitent, neither “the house of mourning” nor “the house of feasting” can benefit you by itself! It is the power of the Holy Spirit alone that can give you life. It is Jesus alone who can make you a forgiven sinner.

May this discourse be blessed to your souls, and to the Triune God be glory! Amen.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.